



**IT'S NEVER TOO LATE!  
CREATING HEALTHY BEHAVIOR CHOICES FOR SENIORS**

### What Are Healthy Behavior Choices?

A balanced, nutritious diet, engaging in a continuous program of physical activity, quitting smoking, taking the influenza vaccine, social engagement, safe environments, and avoiding excessive alcohol use are examples of healthy behavior choices related to your health. Healthy behaviors are the results of a combination of knowledge, practices, attitudes and opportunities. Healthy behaviors involve choices.

### Changing Demographics

Ontario is home to about 1.5 million seniors – 40 percent of Canada's seniors. By 2028, the number of senior citizens in Ontario will double.

### Economic Impact of Seniors

Seniors' contributions to Ontario society are substantial as reported in The Council on Aging Ottawa, Ottawa Fact Book on Aging, 2004. For example,

- Ottawa seniors paid more than \$650 million in federal and provincial income taxes in 2000
- 60% of seniors report that they are active volunteers.

Of all health care expenditures in Ontario, seniors account for 43%.

### Other Known Facts About Seniors

- According to the 2004 Successful Aging Ottawa Survey of 1,000 seniors, successfully aging seniors report:
  - Being happier
  - Having very good or excellent health
  - Getting out as often they would like
  - Exercising regularly
  - Volunteering in the community
  - Having a higher income
- 70% of Canadians age 65-74 and 61% age 75+ are concerned and taking action about the amount of fat in their diet;
- 52% rate their health as very good or excellent
- In population surveys that follow seniors over time, healthy behaviours such as stopping smoking, physical activity, and healthy weight are associated with increasing chances of healthy aging.

### Promoting Healthy Behaviors Among Seniors

The WHO Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion outlines five actions to guide activities that promote and create opportunities for healthy behavior choices by seniors (8). Examples include:

#### Build healthy public policy

Ensure that public health goal consultations guided by the Federal Minister of State for Public Health, the Honorable Carolyn Bennett, create and encourage healthy behavior choices for seniors.

#### Create supportive environments

Ensure physical activity and recreation centers meet the needs of seniors.

#### Strengthen community actions

Initiate successful aging coalitions of community stakeholders in local communities such as Successful Aging Ottawa (SAO).

#### Develop personal skills

Create educational opportunities in schools, colleges and universities – such as University of the Third Age - to increase awareness about the importance of creating healthy behavior choices for older adults and to provide problem-solving skills to seniors who wish to change their behaviors.

#### Reorient health services

Challenge health care organizations such as long-term care homes to include opportunities for seniors to engage in physical activity and to improve nutrition options.

### References

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